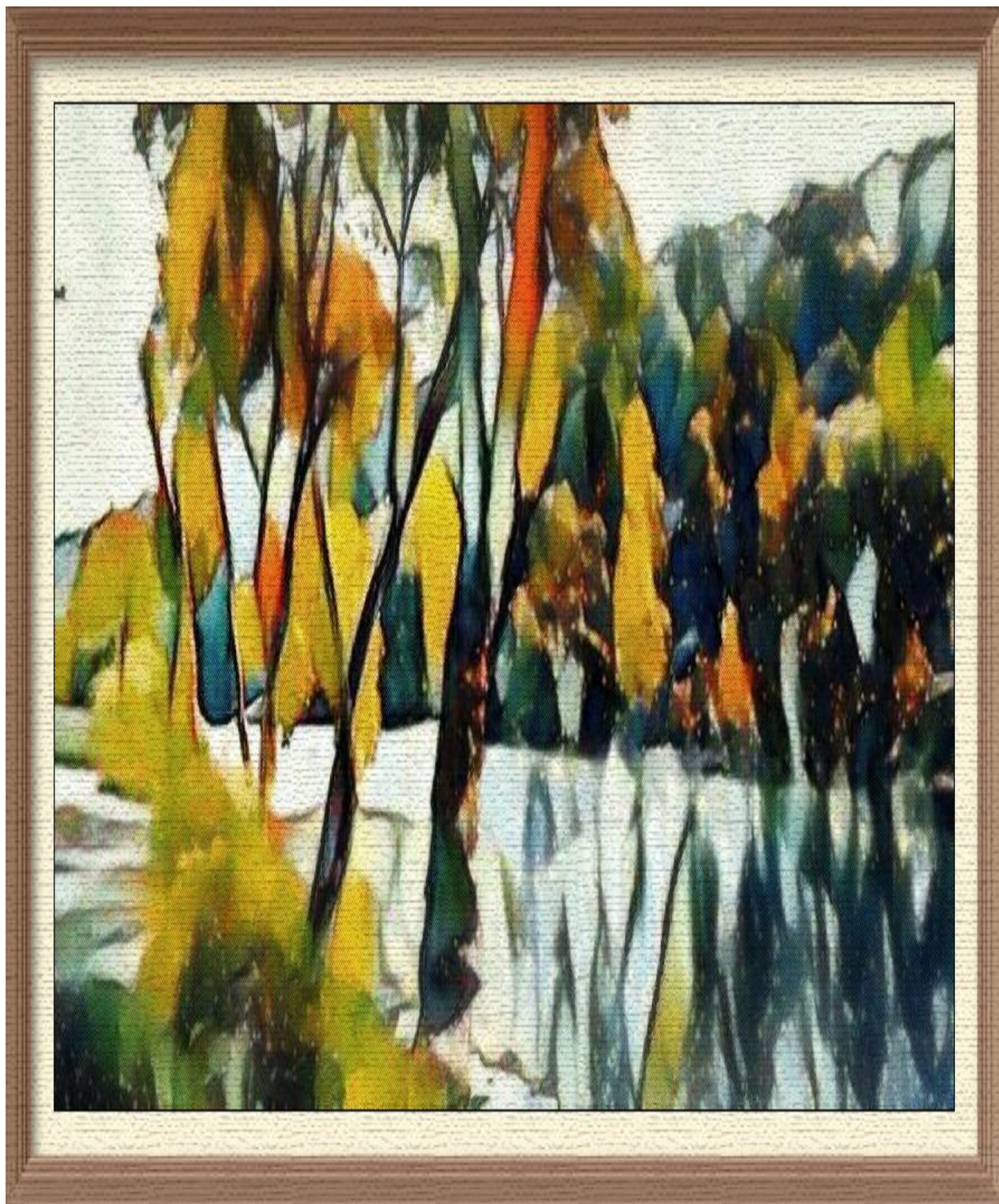


Adam Fieled

Major Odes



On the Schuylkill

Borne by the river's back, boat-legions rolled
in search of commerce, bridges to build;
souls, cargo (heavy, light), bought & sold,
coffers waiting in Philly to be filled.
Ladies leaped gingerly onto green banks,
bound in satin or lace, versed in politesse or no,
& walked rote patterns, inscribed insignias in the air;
crew-ship kids, underlings already in their ranks,
sought to make the landing show-offy, slow,
hulked a hundred yards from a drunken fair.

Add a century, an Expressway looms over
the murk— wave-sounds, squeals, & metal—
which the Schuylkill cannot answer, hovering
under— slow-moving, patient, & settled.
The river's mind is limpid— the human race
churns around it restlessly, adding bodies
shorn of dignity, bloated, pulp-bloody, blue,
having carried burdens the river never dreams
of, emptiness so incorrigible the Schuylkill's face
registers nothing but disinterested waves— tender, true.

The Over-brain, peering in, questioning, elevates
the Schuylkill's mystery into frozen heat—
truth & beauty buoyed up in the browning, decay, fate
of all water-bodies prone to human meat—
I sit on the edge, watching overhanging leaves,
frozen myself by the gross negligence
of what lies beneath the river's surface,
& my own, as the summer sun inverts, grieves,
for the masses, exploring no penitence
as I am, grounded, here, & diving for purpose—

2017-2020, Conshohocken

On Exile

No bells strike at Saint Matthew's; midnight
means lights out; across Fayette Street, windows
send slow signals; but for hope of daylight,
no means of evoking, painted or not, halos.
Occasional cars; the 7-11 parking lot empties
not completely, the night crew forced to spill
laced coffee, pills, down throats, past painted
faces reflecting gloom, as they plan candies
passed around to kill behind, enemies
locked in basements, unwilling dross killed.

Dull, dense, reptile-laden world— nature's phantom
side, scarred with imperatives to destroy— I
stride past Calvary Episcopal, its handsome,
enchanted spires, trying to forge a "who" and "why."
Caravaggio's John the Baptist, crouched darkly
in murk, I superimpose on Conshohocken at
night, including the succession into severed head—
knowing that in there (7-11), warnings sharply
uttered mean nothing, less than nothing at that,
humanity is lost, then its corpse is bled.

This is not the world I was born for— Butler
Pike, a Honda pulls into the abandoned
Dairy Queen lot, the young male driver scuttles
out into the apartment complex, fear-flattened—
as to what John Milton would say about these
suburban straits, everyone changing form
like Satan, a poet singed by lost innocence
up all night on his own pills, thoughts, caffeine—
I divine he knew all this, putrid fires warmed
to kill brains, rigid rules passed on, idiot to idiot.

2015, Conshohocken

Ode On Jazz

Physical beauty, Formal Rigor of God—
spiritual beauty, Economy of God—
Natural Will, Transcendent Will,
Facile Will in all its' dismal "there-ness"—

Piano broken chords breaking down space
like watching bits of paper collect,
contained in a 12-bar blues; root
notes you tend to lean on,
or maybe a honking minor third,
a harmonic multi-colored sharp...

Follow your compulsion into flurries,
clusters of connecting phrases,
then a pause to sanctify as the progression
resolves after lingering on the fifth
for the appointed time—
pentatonics mainly w/ some suspensions,
sheets of sound, trademark leaps,
like watching a rainbow erupt
out of the placid bowels of street-lakes,
sparrows in the gutters,
Eliot-esque alienation syncopated
impossibly high & mighty...

Repeat the repetition now into major scale—
Ionian gold, major-third suspensions again,
almost midnight for tremulous trees,
also hipsters, flights of birds, rabbis
in the wilderness as blues ends; here's a quicker
quirkier jarring bit to cut
your teeth on...

Base bottom notes natural like ferns,
ride the ride cymbal like musical fellatio,
roll w/ rolls & kick-drum ejaculations,
what Hart Crane heard in bridges,
only blues (so bridge seldom comes),
stasis achieved nicely replicates movements,
bowel, kidney, heart-beat, daring snare of lip-ness,
thickness, quickness,

get it all out for all of us into the brick-laden city,

mutter of exhausted midnight buses
as vibrato notes shiver, miniature
solos on the toms creates energy
of emptiness among the weird abundance,
concluding w/ roll on the snare, now bass
also investigates metaphysical space,
not so much implacable as inexhaustible
eruptions; spring of autumn,
autumn of spring...

Seasons of balance, compromise,
away from extremes; Middle Path exteriorized,
oh piano on a minor seventh which bespeaks
longing for a more ethereal world,
elegiac as the last apple of October, eaten
by a Halloween camp-fire, beyond blues
of Earth into cadence, dying fall of pure moon,
ravaged, torn from the throat of persistence,
mute existence destroyed completely
and on fire, a universe of fingers & mouths,
looking down the tide of Death into eternity,
square-shouldered & erect,
freezing into whims of Ultimate "there-ness",
beyond ordinary notions of quotidian abyss
in one long sitting pow-wow peace-pipe corn-cob
wholesome dinner of Voidness,
but insinuated only to drive away singularity....

Jazz is plural,
they give you a space, show you its' contours,
allow you to move around & drown
if you want over hilltops of remorse, created
by Love or dolorous longing & especially
Central Parks of the soul & intellectual Bordello
life cut & pasting its' bleak outline over rooftops
& bluebirds—

2002, Logan Square, Philadelphia

On A Marriage

I.

Fish, fish tank ricocheted through my skull
as I lay on the thin, tough-skinned, scrappy
grey couch. What was in the next room stank, unhappy
yokels knowing I'd trespassed past the full
load I'd dumped on them. They wouldn't let us
sleep together; Jen slept in a room with her sister,
as I tossed, poison-brained, through several blistering
nights in the Harrisburg 'burbs— cornfields, husks
staring fish-eyed at the bizarre married couple.
She was hollowed out around corn, body doubled.

If only I knew what to ask her then: "Jen,
I need to know if this is real. I need to know, also,
if there's something in you I do not or cannot know,
if you're really my wife (whom I love), trusted friend?"
But I flailed away in Liverpool's darkness, silence-tied,
& I hadn't seen or known the inside of a trailer before,
Jennifer had known little else, & I hadn't known this war,
but force in our bodies engendered a tornado'd sky,
force in our souls lay dormant. Grandfather clock shone five.
Window showed black husks thrust upwards, moon alive.

About the doubling of Jen's body, I knew nothing.
About the way she'd trotted out before me, emerging
from a kind of mist, lean, tow-headed, urgent
about preserving roots I hadn't seen, something
lascivious branded us blackly, gradually, as though
I should know all there was to know, like this
tensed trailer— scarecrow fronted, ragged, just drips
from the shower spout, Jen a trailer princess, no
way to see beneath arable land's surface,
no scheme to pull back a secret temple's curtains.

II.

Five floors up on the elevator: I was too
thin, almost collapsed from humidity outside,
but Jennifer, the knowledge of her insides,
held me up, with luggage we carried through.
Why the compulsion was there, prodded us
into instant betrayal, I cannot say or know now—

clothes got piled sloppily, hotly, on a rug, brown
as always at the Atherton Hilton, clean, fussed
for breaking, entering, conventioners, academics,
now two incredibly horny, moody adolescents.

Soon, the room was a desert island, the bed a sand-dune.

We were washed ashore after fucking, over & over.

No one in history had been so marooned with a lover.

Every time I touched her, I risked rousing a monsoon.

Wave after wave broke, entered. We didn't exist

except as pistons in a tropical engine. Glasses of water,
occasional baths, a little TV, body-boundaries slaughtered,
so that when we hit the Arts Fest, it didn't resist.

My brain had spokes spinning the wrong way, but
she took the Pandora's Box & nailed it shut.

What was backed up for her: everything, nothing.

I had no yen for anything but to survive. Nights there
were like days. We never had leave to figure out where
we were. Tunnels spiraled down & up: something
heaved, out in the world. Someone under the bed
seemed to be nudging us; maybe how we'd been
reduced to carnage. Being in her: what I was in
was sheets rumped, no maid, dementia in the head.

We ate nothing: crackers, occasional food on College Ave.

Once I spun to McLanahan's: lines crazy, bodies mad.

What kind of marriage could be born from this?

Justice of the Peace be damned, only two kids on fire
for each other, from a place not without depth, kissed
by strange fate into each other, hard-wired

to memorize only two-in-one harmony, could know

or see, as we wrestled only to fall deeper into space

held together not at all, spiraling into boundlessness—
fragile, evanescent, bloody-minded into callousness

against the loveless, timid hordes, not ready to face

anything but this— we could only be there, then go—

2021, Harmonville, Plymouth Meeting

On A Party

Hipsters curled around the banister, as I
guided her up the stairs; caught at loose
ends, no place to be private, have a lie
down, spent from the joints & the juice.
Marianne's bulbous blue eyes went coy,
cast themselves carpet-wards, assured by
no means of conquest-success, as she saw
I had no idea what was coming. I (shy)
could not have known, chosen boy,
what in her was earth, & what sky.

No one noticed anyway. We found ourselves
in a little dark corridor, leading
to a single door. Dreamy, beyond ourselves
in torpor, it seemed Marianne was bleeding—
had seen enough of the party. Wanly, she
sprawled on a nondescript, queen-sized bed.
I paced, spaced, in stoned agitation.
We had, I'd missed, one chance for salvation—
she wanted the flush fullness of head to head.
The marriage she arranged was brief, & free.

If I could crawl back, slowly, through the years,
to revisit what it was like inside
Your Highness, whose big bones & husky jeers
ring down the ages like a water-slide,
I'd say it was a stern, thick-walled tunnel,
monitored carefully by the two blue
orbs, so that I felt tutored by her flesh,
a curious sense of being seen through,
like I'd lived my life & was reaching death,
so into a judgment place my soul was funneled.

When they put Marianne on the cover of a penny
paper, all of Philly saw what I saw; the eyes
probing, feeling into space for signs of any
lived life, even as the bikini was no disguise—
standing, as she did then, for fertility, but
an interior version, if you knew her, or cared
to understand why her magnetism boiled;

that picture, there for a week, was eternity's stare
down the barrel of obsolescence, as her eyes shut,
that night, to me & the party, & remained unsoiled.

2020-2022, Harmonville, Plymouth Meeting

Ode on Waves

Raw December chill: I stood, smoking, outside
Starbucks, staring through the pane façade
at a brunette teenager, fine-featured, who looked like
me, bent over a history book; moody, pawed
at by circumstances past her control. I thought of
State College, my sublets, also a buried past,
attempts at being a consummate artist, & at love.

The tapestry around my brain being woven
showed a vignette, disappearing into exiled years,
someone of my kith & kin, damned not to last—

acclaimed as useless. When I'd walk Conshy streets,
I was always, without knowing it, looking for her.
If it was Manayunk, I'd put on the old shirts, sleeves
still unstained by years of heavy use, eyes stirred
by possibility. Or Center City, shady ghost-like incisions
of the old Aughts scenester crew, now vacant,
derelict, all guesses at identity lost, open to revision—
in another paned façade, summer's day, reflections
of poison in the air, the iced coffee (even), the toilets,
waves against all we'd held together here breaking—

&, as one who ages must know, why waves have to break.
Natural human progression: everything covered up.
Natural human predilection: to bolster everything fake;
& yet if you can fight the masses, the rackets, with guts,
you are inscribing the light of heaven into willing granite,
from the haunted, furrowed brows of the doomed
who deserved better, to the idle buzzers whose vanity
filled the galleries, clubs, coffee shops, with human
energy, a sense of hipness, rightness, in earlier times,
so that your life still holds the unity of one heart, one room.

There's what you can make right, what you can't, lots of
grey area around, sort of, maybe, "I'll find out later,"
attempts at what you think, inebriated, enflamed, is love,
what gets produced beyond your control, faked or fated.
So I stood there, saw her through that pane, Whitmarsh
Shopping Center moving heedlessly, cheaply, around us,
& she was more real than a Grecian Urn, or Shelley's skylark,

I could've run away, she might've, torn the frozen panic
of what it meant, but didn't: this, later, is what I can give her, lines,
whatever else doesn't matter, this is the wave for the two of us.

2019, Conshohocken

Cheltenham Elegy #702

His heart ached within a drowsy, numbed trance.
Cameras panned to him pacing the black-top, even
blackier at 3 am, which opens out on the expanse
of Mill Road, down the hill, past the school. Night deepened,
he was lonely enough to cry, heartsick for being
the only one of a scabrous tribe gutsy enough to say the name
which even then had rent Cheltenham, riddled
with bullets like a dog's corpse, assassins fleeing
the site of the hit, where the one kid, bound for fame,
did for himself the trick of ditching a tepid middle.

He levitates past himself, flies with bugs into crevices,
is the pilot of the few airplanes wafting by, Pegasus-like
for a mind intent on flight, meeting divinity, heaven's bliss
from a cockpit. Myers' schoolyard glistens like spikes.
She knew him then, at her end— saw how the spine
imposed truth on empty gesture, feeling on pretense,
vital life on the living death of their shared enterprise.
This, he could never know; yet without knowing how, why,
he strode past her emptied house that night, tense,
sweating in summer's stew, pallid in cold surprise.

The apostate flies around a small room, piles of books,
papers scattered, forests of drafts, faintly heard bird-song.
Verdurous plains suggest themselves; moss-softened nooks;
just out of time, to a mind o'er spelled by word-song.
He can only fly as he reads, over & over, the lays
already fastened to moss & flower, secured above
shallow stream. His friend waits, in stealth.
The early morning ride he caught then, from love
given, wasn't her— she had gone the way
there is no coming back— yet he slept himself back to health.

2021-2022, Harmonville, Plymouth Meeting

Credits

Argotist Online Poetry— Cheltenham Elegy #702

Otoliths— Ode On Waves

P.F.S. Post— On Exile, On A Marriage, On A Party

Seven Corners Poetry— Ode On Jazz

X-Peri— On the Schuylkill

cover image of the Schuylkill River treated by Adam Fieled, 2022